were maintained on account of balance of payment reasons are freely importable. The removal of restrictions has not altered the overall rate of growth of imports of the country. The import growth rate during the year 2000-2001 was only 7.27% in rupee terms and 0.27% in US dollar terms. The growth rate of imports during the first nine months of financial year 2001 -2002 was only 0.31 % in Dollar terms and 4.55% in Rupees terms, compared to the same period for the previous year. The import data for 714 items, QRs on which were removed on 31.03.2000, for the year 2000-2001, indicates a growth in import of these items by less than 6%. Similarly, the import of 300 sensitive items, which is being monitored by a Standing Group of Secretaries, has also not indicated any surge in imports in the first nine months of financial year 2001 -2002. The overall picture that emerges is thus one of normal trading activity in response to demand and supply factors. However, imports are constantly being monitored and the Government is determined to ensure, through appropriate use of tariff and other mechanisms, **that** imports do not cause any serious detriment or injury to the domestic producers. The economic liberalization programme being followed by the country is aimed at, *inter alia,* enhancing the efficiency of resource utilization and productive use of resources. As an indicator thereof, it may be seen that during the period from 1990-91 to 2001-2002, India's exports have grown fromUSS 17998.00 million to US$ 43998.53 million, an increase of 144% *i.e.* approximately 2.5 times.

In order to boost agricultural exports, quantitative restrictions on export of wheat and its products, butter, grain and flour of barley, Maize, Bajra, Ragi and Jowar have been removed. Export restrictions like registration requirements on Butter, Wheat and Wheat products, Coarse Grains, Cashew to Russia and packaging requirements on groundnut oil and pulses have also been removed. Restrictions on export of all cultivated (other than wild) varieties of seed, except Jute and Onion have been removed.

Closure of Asbestos manufacturing units

4989. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to shut down Asbestos Sheet manufacturing units in India as it can cause lung cancer to the workers exposed to it;

(b) if so, by when manufacturing of Asbestos Sheet is likely to be closed keeping in view the fact that it is already banned in most of the developed countries; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (DR. RAMAN SINGH): (a) to (c) There is no conclusive scientific evidence on the harmful effects of Asbestos. Further, the units manufacturing Asbestos Sheets have to follow various safety norms prescribed by Bureau of Indian Standards to protect workers employed in these units against the harmful effects of Asbestos. Therefore, in the absence of any conclusive evidence to suggest that manufacture of Asbestos Sheets causes lung cancer amongst workers employed in these units, it is not desirable to ban production of these sheets.

Benefits to fanners from Agricultural Export Zones

† 4990. SHRIMATISAV1TASHARDA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that farmers are being benefited substantially with the setting up of special Agricultural Export Zones;

(b) if so, whether Government are considering to take any steps for making it more effective; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDI): (a) to (c) One of the objectives of setting up Agri Export Zones (AEZ) is to benefit the farmer, a vital component of the entire supply chain from farm to the market. Specifically, AEZs contemplate farmer-oriented benefits such as training in pre-and-post harvest technologies, distribution of quality seeds, land development etc.

New Auto Policy

4991. SHRI PREM CH AND GUPTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the new auto policy is claimed to be a roadmap for the automobile industry after the removal of quantitative restrictions; and

(b) if so, what are the details of this policy and its impact on the future growth of the industry?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDI): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The new auto policy has already been laid before the Parliament on 7th March, 2002. The

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.